CBS Wins Verdict In Case Involving Death of Rasputin

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NEW YORK, Nov. 8 (UPI) A State Supreme Court jury found today that the Columbia Broadcasting System was within its rights in dramatizing the 1916 assassination of Rasputin for television and refused to award any damages to Prince Felix Youssoupoff, the assassin.

In effect, the jury upheld the concept that events of general historical significance are in the public domain and may be subjected to literary and dramatic treatment despite the objection of those who took part in them.

CBS was sued for $1.5 million by Rasputin's slayer, Youssoupoff, 79, who charged that the television drama was made without his consent and was inaccurate. In addition to claiming invasion of privacy, he complained that the film suggested that he had pandered his beautiful 21-year-old wife to lure the lecherous monk to his death.

Neither the Czarist nobleman nor his royal wife, Princess Irina Romanoff Youssoupoff, were present when Mrs. Patricia James, foreman of the jury of nine men and three women, announced the verdict. The Youssoupoffs both testified during the four-week trial.

The communications industry had watched the case with interest as it could have set a precedent if the jury had awarded damages to Youssoupoff in this civil case. The jury's decision against him was unanimous.

Apparently the fact that Youossoupoff himself had described in two books how he poisoned, shot and beat Rasputin to death in the basement of the Youssoupoff palace in Petrograd, now Leningrad, weighed against him. The jury called for the books during their deliberations and viewed the television film for a third time.

Justice Wilfred Waltemade had warned the jury that it was not to consider the question of the murder, for which Youssoupoff was never prosecuted, but only whether the Prince had suffered damages because of the film.